One may judge with a greater degree of certainty the intellectual capacity of the seemingly alert Atayal. They have a concept of space and measurement of space. As a measure of length, which they need in building their houses and in weaving, they use the measures provided by nature, i.e. the ell and the arm span with both arms outstretched. They have no means of measuring an area or a weight. They speak of a large field, or a heavy antelope, but they are unable to be more specific about it. As dry measure they use the men's caps, if, for example, one neighbor helps another out with a cap full of millet or salt. For gunpowder they are said to have recently begun to use bamboo sticks a span long.

39: Wiedfeldt--10-11 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 241, 581, 805, 822 Atayal

The concept of time... is not strange to the Atayals, although they also lack a system of measuring time. They have no word or idea for month or for day. They only have two designations for hot time and cool time. Some tribes have words for sunrise, the zenith of the sun, and sunset, but as far as I have been able to ascertain they have no word for midnight. [11] For their practical needs they make use of other means. The length of time that it is possible to plant a field is given in the terms of the number of harvests obtained from the field. Since none of them know how old they are, marriageability is indicated by tattooing. When I asked if one could give his age according to the number of harvests, there being only one harvest a year, I was always told...that one could only obtain three harvests from one field, and that their people had experienced many more harvests. In summoning their clan and tribal assemblies, as well as in negotiations with the Japanese, the day is fixed according to the number of times they would normally sleep up to that time, and by the nodes in a bamboo staff, or the Japanese indicate the time by the knots in a string. According to the Japanese, it is not unusual for an Atayal to turn up a day early, because, for example, he slept twice in one day when he was hunting, and hence had counted two knots. Harvest time is easily recognized by the ripening of the fruit. The time to plant millet is determined according to the time when the Formosa maple has young red shoots...Rice is planted when the tse-tung-non, a tree of average size, is covered with white blossoms.

39: Wiedfeldt--11-12 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 177, 436, 555, 622, 802 Atayal

The Atayals have a better idea of counting than they have of measuring time. Most of them, to be sure, can only count up to three or five, and that is sufficient for their purposes. Anyone who can count up to thirty is considered clever, and only a few individuals in the border tribes can count up to a hundred. Some of the Japanese maintain that a smart Atayal of the interior can count up to a thousand, but most people say that this is just talk. Most of the tribes are said to have names for numbers up to five only, and to count further by saying five and one, five and two, five and three, five and four. They have a special word for ten, and also for twenty and thirty. Some tribes are said to know more words for numbers, but they seem to have acquired them recently through Chinese or Japanese interpreters. Most of the clan heads can count this way up to twenty or thirty. If they need to go beyond that, they call in a wise man to help them, if fines are to be paid. They also have to count when they are fixing the prike of the bride or the price for adopted children. They count 25 rokosch-kaha, or 250 yen, by putting down 20 rokosch-kaha, or garments with precious [12] materials, and 10 bintoan, breastpieces with precious materials. Presumably the calculation is made at once in this way, and the reduction to a common denominator is made by the interpreter. In tribes that have lived for years inside the Aitu line, and that accept Japanese money, families will sell a rokosch-kaha together with their profit on it for 13 or 15 yen, because they can conceive only of 13 as 1 rokosch-kaha plus 1 binrai, or 15 as 1 rokosch-kaha plus 1 bintoan, but they can not imagine 11, 12, or 14 yen.

39: Wiedfeldt--12 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 212, 811, 821 Atayal

The Atayals know nothing about fields of knowledge which are somehow connected in thought, or have some sort of a slight connection. They have not yet progressed to the point of having written characters, or even to the point of having definite marks. ... — Even a rudimentary knowledge of astronomy... is foreign to the Atayals. They know nothing about the moon and its phases, and they have no names for constellations... The only celestial phenomenon that they are acquainted with and have spun fancies about is the rainbow. They think it is a bridge which connects the island with the mainland for their dead. ...

39: Wiedfeldt--12 [2] F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 156, 437 Atayal

The Atayals are shrewd, and know how to act with thought and calculation in everything that concerns their vital needs. Among the border tribes, they have learned how to trade quickly, and they are quick to press their own advantage, the women in barter with the Japanese traders, and the men in their political dealings with the Japanese officials.

39: Wiedfeldt--12-13 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 625, 723, 177.62 Atayal
636.62 Japanese

They succeeded over and over again in taking Japanese troups by surprise through their stratagems in battle, so that the Japanese army, which is admitted to be good, [13] proved to be of little use in these battles, and has been replaced by numerous policemen, who live there for long periods and are not so easily outwitted.

After a period of years in which many Atayals were killed by coming in contact with the wire of the Aiyu line, which is charged with 2,000 volts, they have now found out that they can slip between the wires without harming themselves by holding them apart by long bamboo sticks, to the ends of which they have attached empty sake bottles. To think beyond immediate necessities to more remote ends and to provide for these in advance, seems too difficult to most of the Atayals. In spite of occasional crop failures, they accumulate no stores of provisions, nor do they observe a closed season in hunting or spare the young game.

39; Wiedfeldt--13 [2] F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 153, 182, 622 Atayal

Some of them, of course, are able to think further agead. For years, some of the tribal chiefs have understood and have attempted to make the others understand that individual fights against the Japanese on the part of different tribes mean useless shedding of blood, and that their only hope lies in common action by all the tribes. They have not achieved a great measure of success, due largely to the difficulty of introducing new ideas into the mind of the Atayals, who do not follow their heads, but the prize skulls. ...They are capable of observing closely, and often make slow but correct deductions from their observations...

39: Wiedfeldt--13-14 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 184, 535 Atayal

...The extent to which the Atayals possess imagination may be deduced from their accomplishments in those fields in which imagination is freest: in art forms and in religious concepts. In the field of the simplest artistic endeavor, the dance, [14] the Atayals have the round dance, in which men and women join hands and walk, rather than dance, about... They have no pantomime dances, nor do the individual dancers execute varying rhythmical movements....

39: Wiedfeldt--14 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 553 Atayal

Many of the round dances are accompanied by songs. Apart from this, the young people also sing little songs when they are sitting in the bush. These songs have simple variations in tone, which might be described as melodies. As an accompaniment, or more correctly, as a prelude and finale, they blow a small bamboo pipe, called a dohdonn. By blowing it and pulling at the same time at a thread, a tongue of wood is set swinging and producing soft notes like those of an Aeolian harp. They have no other musical instruments, even in battle, where they would merely be a hindrance to their technique of surprise attack. Their poetry is limited to little songs, an example of which is the touching lament of a widower. Among the songs translated by Professor Florenz Yokohama and printed in Vol. VII of these reports, there are some that are quite interesting. They deal with the hunt, love festivals, work, praise of the ancestors. In other words, they deal with immediate realities in general, without rising to more inclusive concepts.

39: Wiedfeldt--14 [2] F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 302, 341, 531 Atayal

The Atayal huts are functional structures with no pretence at artistry. One is made just like the next. They have no temples or public halls. They know nothing of plastic art, having no figures of wood or clay. In contrast to the other peoples of Formosa, they do not decorate their weapons and tools with carvings. They have only two kinds of decoration: interwoven stripes of color and designs in their garments, and tattooing on the face and breast. Both are repeated without change in a definite, fixed manner, according to tradition.

39: Wiedfeldt--14 [3] F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 771 Atayal

Their imagination is not much more productive in religious matters... The Atayals have neither God nor devil; they worship neither heaven, nor sun, nor earth.

39: Wiedfeldt--14 [4] F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 773 Atayal

They have not worked out for themselves any ideas concerning the origin of the earth. According to them, the first people were a brother and sister who were brought into existence by an earthquake in the mountains, and who, after tattooing the woman, made the first marriage.

39: Wiedfeldt--14-15 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 555, 761, 775 Atayal

According to their ideas, worthy [15] people live on after death. Such persons would include successful skull-hunters and women skilled at weaving. Hence, worth does not include merely the manly virtues... The dead cross the sea to the "great land" by way of the rainbow, and in the process, the unworthy, that is, those who are not tattooed, fall into the sea, or are cast down among the Taroku by the ancestors. The others continue to live together with their ancestors, just as they had lived before, and with the tools and weapons that were buried in the grave with them. This whole story is possibly an attempt to explain the incomprehensible manner in which a person is living and then is dead. In any event, the idea of reward or punishment after death for their actions during life is foreign to them, although their expression, "the wrath of the ancestors", which is applied to infractions of the law, seems to indicate the existence of such a concept.

39: Wiedfeldt--15-16 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 241, 769, 778 Atayal

There is a trace of ancestor worship in the tribal celebrations and also in the clan celebrations, which...are held for such members of the clan as can not attend the tribal celebration. Members of other tribes are not permitted to attend these celebrations, which unite all the members of the tribe, even if they were members before marriage. In the festival of the millet planting the chief of the tribe is said to thrust four bamboo stakes into the ground in a field that has been cleared of weeds early in the morning. Into the square thus formed he pours millet wine and millet mush, and standing in the middle, he says: "According to old customs and usages handed down to us we celebrate today, as our ancestors in this land have always celebrated. We thank our ancestors that we and our children are well. We wish that the millet which we are planting may bring us a rich harvest. We wish that our ancestors would protect us against illness. We thank our ancestors from the bottom of our hearts." Then he says to the assembled members of the tribe] "Everything is done", and they drink to gether the millet wine which they have brought with them. The harvest celebration is the same, except that the wish for a rich harvest is replaced by a prayer of thanks. In spite of my efforts, I have never been able to find out how they think their ancestors will protect them against illness or just how they procure them a rich harvest. I have also not been able to determine whether any special festivals or religious acts take place on Mt. Sylvia, which according to the Japanese is sacred to the Atayals. [16] The Atayals themselves say nothing about it, and foreigners have not yet penetrated that far into Atayal territory.

39: Wiedfeldt--16 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 755, 776, 787, 791 Atayal

Superstitions, fear of spirits, or similar things...are unknown to them. The old woman of the clan, the hamangoppu, tattooes, administers medicines in case of illness, and foretells whether the patient will recover, or whether the woman will have a child. She does this by dropping pieces of elder pith on a bamboo board which she holds on her knees and counting the number of pieces that fall. A raven that lights on a hut is considered an evil omen. This belief does not exist among the Chinese or Japanese. Their imagination has produced no other superstitions or spells.

39: Wiedfeldt--16 [2] F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 153, 811, 177.65 Atayal
636.65 Japanese

The capacity of the Atayals to grasp something that has been told them is also limited. If one attempts to tell them something through the medium of an interpreter, one runs up against a complete lack of comprehension, even if it is only a question of their forming a new concept out of elements already known to them. They do not even have an idea of the power of the Japanese, of which they should have been clearly conscious in view of the bloody battles that they have had with them. In order to make them aware of this, and to scare them off from making further attacks, the Japanese have very cleverly taken a number of highly respected Atayals to Tokyo every year at the expense of the state, so that they could get an idea there by what they themselves could see of the power and the resources of Japan, and could then tell the members of their tribe. The sum total of all this is that the Atayals do not completely lack imagination...but it has been employed only in a few fields, and has not been very productive even in these...

39: Wiedfeldt--22-23 F-3 (1913) 1917 Formosan Aborigines
116, 133, 181, 501 Atayal

The Atayals live on an island but they are not a seafaring people. On the eastern coast of Formosa, where they have settled right down to the shore, navigation is so difficult, even for modern coastal steamers, as a result of an exceptionally strong current, [23] that getting from a boat to a ship even in good weather is sure to mean a ducking, as I know from experience. In bad weather it is impossible to get from a boat to a ship, or vice versa...For the Atayals, who could make only the simplest kind of boats with their few tools, such as hollowed-out tree trunks, or rafts, no navigation is possible here.

Whether the Atayals of the west coast, where navigation is easier, have ever settled close to the sea, does not seem probable to me. Their traditions speak of their mountains and also of the plain which lies before the mountains, but they do not mention the sea. They would not have been able to plant the swampy plains near the sea, which today yield a rich crop of rice under Chinese hands, just as they even now do not make use of places in their territory which are very fertile, but which require a great deal of work. If they had gone to sea, they would have had to know a few constellations, whereas they are unacquainted with stars and points of the compass...

As inhabitants of an island, they have been spared the fate of being overrun and annihilated by a foreign culture...

I have not been able to determine the basic reasons for their reserve. Perhaps it is rooted in excessive pride of race, not to say, haughtiness of race, as some of the Japanese maintain... It is also partly due to a certain shyness. In the presence of people who belong to other races, the Atayals drop their voices to a whisper, and display a prudent reserve in spite of the curiosity of the others. The sources of this attitude, however, continue to be a mystery; the only thing that is clear is their attitude of reserve.